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THTR 291.01: ST - Acting Improvisation

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ACTING IMPROVISATION
School of Theatre & Dance – University of Montana
THTR 291-01/ Fall 2017 / 3 credits / CRN 74544
M/W 3:30 – 4:50 PM; PART 035

Instructor

Joel Shura
MFA in Directing Candidate

Contact Information

joel.shura@umontana.edu
General Office: 406-243-4481

Office Hours

Education Bldg. Lobby
F 1:00 – 3:00 or by request

“There are people who prefer to say ‘Yes’, and there are people who prefer to say ‘No’. Those who say ‘Yes’ are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say ‘No’ are rewarded by the safety they attain.”
– Keith Johnstone

Course AIM: Welcome to Acting Improvisation! This class is designed for any student with a background or interest in acting, especially those considering a career in the performing arts (theatre, music, dance, film, broadcasting). This studio class is intended to cultivate the skill sets necessary to the professional improvisatory actor: spontaneity, playfulness, concentration, positivity, character-building, observation, and the extraordinary courage to fail spectacularly. The work we do throughout the semester may make you feel uncomfortable and exposed—I encourage you to embrace those feelings and jump in with two feet. Try to remember that there are no wrong answers-- only stronger ones-- and we are going to work together to find the stronger answers. This course will be divided into two sections. The first-half of the semester will be dedicated toward long-form improvisation techniques with the goal of an open midterm performance of *The Harold*. The second-half of the semester will focus on short-form techniques with the goal of a final *Theatresports* “competition” performance.

COURSE OUTCOMES: By the end of the semester you will...

- Increase your ability to take risks, be vulnerable, and stay positive
- Play with/through your partner(s)
- Develop an increased relaxation, concentration, and authenticity on stage
- Learn to respond to others with **honesty**, spontaneity and passion
- Stretch your range of playable characters
- Have an increased sense of creativity and theatrical playfulness
- Learn to “not be funny”

Required Texts

Truth in Comedy

Charna Halpern, Del Close, Kim "Howard" Johnson
ISBN- 9781566080033

The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles

Steven Pressfield
ISBN- 9781936891023

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (25%)

Almost all of the work for this course will occur during class. Attendance is, therefore, of the utmost importance. Since the class works closely as an ensemble, the absence of any individual member is counterproductive to the entire group. **Enthusiastic participation** in all in-class activities is essential. Never talk about being tired, and please don't make excuses. Most importantly, each participant must strive to take creative risks, to leap into each scene with courage, trust and generosity. Following is the grading rubric for participation/collaboration: **(10 POINTS)**

9-10 Actively participated, often contributed to discussions/exercises, courteous and invested in the work of others

8-9 Dutifully participated, semi-regularly contributed to discussions/exercises, courteous/invested

7-8 Seldom participated, occasionally contributed to discussions, marginally courteous/invested

6-7 Participated and contributed only when absolutely required, problems with courtesy and investment

0-6 Failed in regards to participation, contribution, courtesy, investment, and professional behavior

In order to earn a passing grade in the course, students must not miss more than 4 class periods. Absences can only be excused if formal documentation is provided (e.g., doctor's note, court notice, obituary with travel itinerary) or if I am notified as to a religious observance conflict. After 2 absences your grade will begin to be effected. 3 absences will result in full letter grade (B). 4 absences will result in automatic failure of class (F). In addition, two tardies (arriving after attendance has been taken, or leaving before the class is finished) will equal one unexcused absence. If your tardiness is extreme, I reserve the right to count you as absent for the day and possibly refuse your admittance into class, out of respect for the other students and to avoid disrupting their learning process.

TAKE-HOME ASSIGNMENTS (25%)

The War of Art. A book report (3 - 5 full pages, typed, double spaced) on *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield. How does the book relate to your work in class? To your life? To being an artist? Discuss specific ideas mentioned in the text. What will you take away from it? How did it make you feel? Was it helpful to you or was it useless? You don't have to like it, but be constructive and intelligent in your argument. **Due September 20th, 2017**

Improvisation Performance Reflection. Please watch a live or digital improv show and reflect on it (3 – 5 full pages, typed, double spaced). What specific techniques do you recognize from class? Focus on key terms: 'Yes, and...', status, relationships, spontaneity, drops of red, etc. What was effective or ineffective about the performance/performers? How could things be improved? I can give some suggestions for good digital performances, if needed. **Please attach a program or website address for the show you watched. Due November 14th, 2017.**

Note: Please print out your papers and have it turned in on the day it's due. I will not accept emails or late papers. No exceptions—please do not ask!

LIVE PERFORMANCES (40%)

The best way to learn to do improv is by doing it in front of an audience. In addition to the required open midterm and final performance, there will be three more open-studio performances. You are required to perform in each. Please plan ahead:

- **Midterm.** Friday, October 18th 3:30 – 4:50 PM
- Wednesday, November 1st 3:30 – 4:50 PM
- Wednesday, November 15th 3:30 – 4:50 PM

- Wednesday, December 29th 3:30 – 4:50 PM
- **Final.** Monday, December 13th 3:30 – 5:00 PM

IN-CLASS SKILL RETENTION (10%)

Students will perform for the class at every meeting. I will evaluate student progress in the following areas: ensemble skills, narrative skills, play, spontaneity, commitment, and their ability to integrate new techniques into their scene work.

Disabled Students Programs & Services:

If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You should also contact the office of *Disabled Student Programs & Services*. The DSPS phone number is 468-3031, and they are located in room 1000 on the Ukiah Campus

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT AND THE STUDENT CONDUCT CODE:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php.

SCHOOL OF THEATRE & DANCE:

All Theatre & Dance students must have an in-depth knowledge of the practices and procedures outlined in the School of Theatre & Dance Student Handbook. The Handbook is available online at <http://www.umt.edu/theatredance/about/handbook>.

Risk: There is inherent risk involved in many Theatre & Dance classes as they are very physical in nature. Please proceed through class, shop, or rehearsal with caution. Always be mindful of your personal safety and the safety of others. Students participating in class/shop/rehearsal/performance do so at their own risk.

Class Etiquette: There is **no eating, drinking, or gum chewing** during the class. Please let me know in writing if you have a medical exception to this policy. **Water in a capped container** is acceptable. Absolutely **no weapons**, real or fake, are allowed in the classroom. When class has ended, please return space to its original condition (in other words, **clean up** after yourselves). Lastly, **electronic devices are to be stowed away** during class unless permission has been given to access them.

Guests: Due to safety considerations, at no point during a student's time spent in class or serving on a production (in any capacity) should non-enrolled persons be guests of that student without the instructor's consent. Presence of such unauthorized persons in a class, shop, or any backstage/off-stage area will negatively affect a student's grade.

DISABILITY SERVICES:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think

you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.